
Chapter 17 Domestic Violence

Abstract

This section will provide VSP with a basic overview of domestic violence by examining its effects on victims and the children who witness the abuse, by assessing the batterer's mentality and by reviewing the necessary tools and resources necessary for responding to domestic violence victimization. Aspects of the physical, psychological and financial impact of domestic violence on its victims are addressed. Protocols and policies within the criminal justice system and community-based intervention programs are also examined.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this section, students will understand the following concepts:

- Understand the prevalence of domestic violence
- Increase awareness of relevant laws and social movements
- Recognize the dynamics of domestic violence
- Identify the behaviors that characterize the cycle of domestic violence
- Improve advocacy skills when responding to domestic violence victims
- Understand the effects of domestic violence on children
- Recognize how the criminal justice system responds to domestic violence cases
- Develop a coordinated response to domestic violence
- Identify the myths associated with domestic violence
- Developing safety plans to assist victims

Listing of Topics Covered

Chapter 18: Domestic Violence

- Overview of the Dynamics of Domestic Violence
- History of Domestic Violence
- Types of Abuse
- Barriers to Leaving
- Risk Assessment
- Safety Planning
- Domestic Violence and its' Effects on Children
- Advocacy and Collaboration

Appendix A: Lethality Risk Assessment

Appendix B: Social Security Information

Appendix C: The Impact of Domestic Violence Fact Sheet

Appendix D: The Effects of Domestic Violence on Children

Appendix E: Myths about Domestic Violence

Appendix F: Domestic Violence Court Support

Appendix G: Safety Planning

Appendix H: Is He Really Going to Change This Time? A Guide for Women Whose Partners are in a Batterer Intervention Program

Appendix I: DMV Request For Confidential Address Protection

Appendix J: Survivor Safety Plan Check List

Appendix K: 62 Ways He Prevents Her From Leaving

Appendix L: South Carolina Domestic Violence Shelter Statistics

Appendix M: H. 3984 Domestic Violence Bill – 2005

Appendix N: A Summary of the Domestic Violence Protection Act of 2003

Overview of the Dynamics of Domestic Violence

With nearly one in four American women between the ages of 18 and 65 experiencing domestic violence¹, it is imperative that VSP are equipped with the appropriate tools to respond to the needs of domestic violence victims. Furthermore, about 45 percent of the female victims of intimate violence in 1998 lived in households with children younger than twelve years old². These alarming statistics demand an improved response to domestic violence among both criminal justice officials as well as community-based organizations.

DEFINING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behavior designed to exert power and control over a person in an intimate relationship through the use of intimidating, threatening and harmful or harassing behavior. It includes multiple forms of abuse, ranging from physical, sexual, emotional or psychological.

Physical abuse is usually recurrent and usually escalates both in frequency and severity. It may include pushing, shoving, slipping or hitting. Restraining or strangling the victim, dragging the victim, or purposely inflicting any sort of physical injuries is classified as physical abuse.

Sexual abuse in violent relationships is often the most difficult aspect of abuse to discuss. It may include any form of forced sex or sexual degradation. Forcing the victim to perform sexual acts against her will is the most common type of sexual abuse, but it can also include pursuing sexual activity when the victim is not fully conscious, physically harming the victim during sex, coercing the victim to have sex without the use of protection, or criticizing the victim and calling her sexually degrading names.

Emotional or psychological abuse may precede or accompany physical violence as a means of controlling through fear and degradation. It may include threats of harm, isolation, jealousy, possessiveness, intimidation, criticizing, lying and blaming.

¹ Rennison & Welchans (May 2000).

² Rennison C. (2000). *Intimate Partner Violence*. Washington, D.C.: BJS. USDOJ.

Myth: Low self-esteem causes victims to get involved in abusive relationships.

Fact: Traditional theories presumed that individuals with adequate self-esteem would not "allow" themselves to be abused by intimate partners or spouses. In fact, *studies have demonstrated that victims of domestic violence fail to share common characteristics other than being female.* (Cahn & Meier, 1995) There is little support for the theory that low self-esteem causes victims to become involved in abusive relationships, however, some victims may experience a decrease in self-esteem as a *result* of being abused, since perpetrators frequently degrade, humiliate and criticize victims.

PERPETRATORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The misconception that only poor, underprivileged families suffer from domestic violence continues to plague our society, but this is simply untrue. Domestic violence is found across ethnic, racial and socioeconomic classes. In fact, approximately 20 to 30 percent of marriages in this country have been characterized at one point by overt interpersonal aggression.³ Violence also seems to be widespread within the context of dating relationships. Approximately one-third of college students report that they experience violence within their intimate relationships.⁴

While numerous studies suggest that men primarily perpetrate domestic violence, in more recent years, some studies have claimed that women use violence as frequently as men do. Men tend to use violence to establish or maintain power and control and women usually use violence either in self-defense, in anticipation of violence or in retaliation for violence perpetrated against them. In other words, if a woman is able to free herself from the abuser, she is very unlikely to continue to use violence. By contrast, most men engage in serial domestic violence: men replace victims when they leave and men continue the cycle of abuse.

Domestic violence occurs as a pattern of abuse and can be distinguished from one-time situational violence, which occurs in many intimate relationships in emotionally charged situations. Domestic violence occurs in intimate relationships, which include current or former spouses, partners, homosexuals, family members, domestic partners such as roommates or caregivers.

Batterer's Mentality. Abusers choose to utilize domestic violence as a means of controlling another person. The individual has a need to ensure that he gains or maintains control of how the partner thinks, feels and behaves. It only takes one instance of physical or sexual violence to instill a fear within the victim, causing the

³ Straus & Gelles. (1990). Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz. 1980.

⁴ Arias, Samios & O'Leary. (1987).

victim to do all she can to avoid future attacks. A victim need only be threatened or harmed once to know the abuser is willing and able to use physical or sexual abuse against her. The abuse tends to utilize different tactics to maintain control of the partner. The victim tends to learn how to tailor response to these tactics or attacks, which frequently change, especially once the abuser catches on to how the victim is responding. When the struggle to challenge the abuser becomes too exhausting or too dangerous, the victim begins to modify her behavior, slowly surrendering control of different aspects of her life in order to avoid future abuse or to simply survive.

The best indicator of whether a man will abuse his spouse or intimate partner is whether he experienced or witnessed violence in his family of origin. However, not all men who grew up in violent homes will necessarily repeat the violent behaviors they were exposed to earlier in their lives. Individual thinking patterns and a set of values is what truly determines whether or not he will abuse.

In short, a person's thoughts create a feeling, upon which a person acts, that results in a particular outcome... all based on the person's belief system. If an individual ultimately believes that it is acceptable to use violence as a means of intimidating and controlling their partner, they will eventually become abusive.

DEVELOPMENT OF A DOMESTIC VIOLENCE RELATIONSHIP

No woman intentionally chooses a partner that is abusive. Usually the abuse gradually develops and when the abuser eventually utilizes violence, the woman is already at a point at which she feels as if she can't leave her abuser because he has manipulated and groomed her so that she won't leave him.

Most victims describe the beginning of their relationship as being romantic and intense. Her partner tends to be very attentive and involved, taking an active interest in where she goes, what she does and how she spends her time. He encourages her to spend most of her time with him so that they can be together and he begins making decisions for her. Simultaneously, he flatters her, confides in her and tells her how much he needs her in his life.

These red flags are often confused as being signs of devotion rather than those of an abusive personality. Other suspicious behaviors include being overly protective and insisting on knowing her whereabouts at all times. These red flags also include the rapidness in which he establishes himself in her life, including making decisions for her, stating his inability to live without her and insisting on a commitment to a relationship.

As the relationship continues, she is drawn to the positive side of his actions, his attentiveness and his interest in her activities and the people in her life. She may

be flattered by his initial bouts of jealousy. Usually under pressure to do so, she makes a commitment to him very early in their relationship.

Domestic violence generally begins with forms of control through psychological and emotional abuse. He begins making suggestions of things that he would like her do, but the truth is her behavior or appearance is not good enough. She begins to experience his anger if she does something he does not like. He believes that any action she takes that draws positive attention from others, especially from other men, is a threat to him.

When confronted with the first incident of physical abuse, the victim will typically view the response as a behavior that is not typical of this person and will not occur again. It is normal then, for the victim to excuse, explain or forgive the behavior. This is a normal response for anyone in a new relationship experiencing a new situation. Apologizing and claiming it will never happen again only reinforces this response. The victim is likely to question what caused this behavior and wonder what she did to prompt this behavior, since he has never acted like this before.

In an abusive relationship, the abuser will quickly shift the focus from his behavior to *her* behavior, stating that his actions are provoked, triggered and/or caused by something she did or did not do. The form of blaming can be very subtle or very overt and conveys the message that the victim is responsible for setting him off and future outburst will be avoided if she would just change her behavior.

This process, repeated over and over again, begins to erode her sense of confidence and self-esteem. Additionally, the abuser is beginning the isolation process, questioning whom she spends her time with and suggesting that family and friends are interfering with their relationship and asking or demanding her from not seeing them again. As she becomes more isolated, she has fewer people with whom to reality check.

The victim also experiences a great deal of emotional conflict; confused by why this is happening to her, but also feeling as if she is responsible for the abuse, which results in feelings of shame, embarrassment and humiliation. Additionally, she is grieving the loss of someone she has come to love and the life they intended to create, desperately struggling to change her behavior so that he has no reason to become upset and act badly.

All the while, the abuser is engaged in the thinking pattern of denying he is doing anything unreasonable in making such demands, blaming his actions on her and believing she is responsible for the conflicts they experience. They become enmeshed in a pattern that stops only when she learns that she is not responsible for his behavior and when he is held accountable for his behavior.

Adding to the complexity of this pattern is his increasing use of threats and force. This creates a new reaction of fear, which often keeps the woman trapped in the relationship. She may be safer by staying in the relationship, rather than trying to leave it.

The Cycle of Violence Wheels (Duluth models) can be found in the Appendix section.

History of Domestic Violence

THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE MOVEMENT

English common law declared wife abuse as legal, as long as the husband adhered to the “rule of thumb”: choosing a weapon no thicker than his thumb to use for beating his wife.

The suffrage and progressive social change reform movements of the late 19th century produced legislative changes, ending more than 200 years of regulating wife beating and criminalized the practice regardless of the woman’s behavior. By 1911, laws forbidding wife beating had been passed in every state. However, more than seventy years would pass before the laws were uniformly and consistently enforced throughout the country.

In the U.S., the battered women’s movement emerged in the mid-1970s on the heels of the social activism of the 1960s. It attracted people of diverse political commitments to advocate for women’s rights to freedom from violence in marriages. Safety became to the battered women’s movement what liberation was to radical feminism.

National Events

1972 – The first victim assistance programs were created. Two were rape crisis centers.

1974 –The first law enforcement-based victim assistance programs were created in Florida and Indiana.

1975 – The first statewide crime victims’ rights week was organized in Pennsylvania. The National Office of Victim Assistance (NOVA) formed.

1976 – The first hotlines and shelters for battered women opened in Minnesota and California.

1978 – Oregon is first state to enact mandatory arrest in domestic violence cases⁵.

1980 – The first National Day of Unity against domestic violence takes place in October. Lenore Walker's theory on "the cycle of violence" was published.

Advocates made changes in the legal system and formed legislative coalitions and criminal justice reform projects at the state and federal level.

1994 – The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) was passed as a part of a comprehensive federal package of victims' rights legislation. It was a part of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act and also enhanced Victims of Crime Act (VOCA).

2005 – VAWA was reauthorized

SC State Legislation

1984 – Criminal Domestic Violence Statutes

1991 – Marital Rape Act

1994 – Mandated Arrest Laws

1999 – Mandated DV Training for Law Enforcement Officers

1999 – Reclassification as "controlled substances" for Rohypnol and GHB (current "rape drugs")

2001 – Domestic Violence Fund Legislation – created separate and additional, source of funds to assist programs serving victims of domestic violence and their children by raising the Marriage License Fee,

2002 – The Campus Sexual Act (H.3309) – requires institutions of higher learning to develop, publish and implement policies and practices to promote the prevention, awareness and remedies for campus sexual assault

2002 – Orders of Protection (H. 4431) – amends the current statute to allow victims of domestic violence to file for an order of protection in the county where the victim resides or is sheltered

2002 – Restraining Orders (S.134) – amends current statute relating to an action seeking a restraining order against a person engaged in harassment or stalking so as to provide that a court *may not change a filing fee* for a complaint or motion for a restraining order against a person engaged in stalking or harassment.

2003 – Domestic Violence Protection Act of 2003 – Provides for a number of significant changes to domestic violence law including the elevation of Criminal Domestic Violence of a High and Aggravated Nature to that of a felony, requires law enforcement officers to complete an incident report when citing CDV offenders, allowing judges to suspend sentences in order to refer batterers to treatment to name a few.

2005 – Domestic Violence Bill – Provides for a number of changes and additions to domestic violence law including increased penalties first, second, and third offenses and mandatory annual training for judges at all levels.

Types of Abuse

THE ABUSE CONTINUUM

There are four types of domestic violence abuse discussed in this section:

1. Emotional
2. Physical
3. Financial
4. Sexual

Emotional Abuse. Emotional abuse always accompanies, and in many cases precedes, physical battering. Like hitting, targeted and repeated emotional abuse can have severe effects on the victim's sense of self and reality. This process, when done to prisoners of war, is called brainwashing.

The following are examples of emotional abuse:

- Jokes about habits/faults
- Insults about victim
- Ignoring victim's feelings
- Withholding approval as punishment
- Yelling/invasive personal space
- Name-calling
- Repeated insults/targeted insults
- Labeling
- Repeated humiliation (private)
- Blaming victim for all faults
- Labeling "crazy," "bitch," "whore," "dumb," etc.
- Threatens violence, retaliation
- Puts down abilities as mother, worker, lover
- Demands all attention, resents children
- Tells about affairs
- Offers to stay because victim "needs" him and can't make it alone

Possible consequences to the victim's emotional state:

- In a perpetual state of "waiting for the other shoe to drop"
- Questions sense of reality
- Nervous breakdown/depression/learned helplessness
- Mental illness
- Suicide

Physical Abuse. Hurtful touching/contact directed at wife, intimate partner, children, elderly parent, or sibling:

- Pinching/squeezing
- Pushing/shoving
- Jerking/pulling/shaking
- Slapping/biting
- Shaking with bruises
- Hitting/punching/kicking
- Choking/objects thrown

Conventional violence

Accepted in child rearing in 87-94% of all families. Research indicates that men equal women in use.

Battering/Victimization

Statistics indicate that men do this to women resulting in targeted and repeated abuse, more serious damage, higher rates in the most dangerous and injurious forms of violence (e.g., gun, knife) and research also shows that women using violence in this area are doing so in a "self-defense response" to blows initiated by men. Violence is a means of "controlling," and the victim is "powerless."

- Targeted/repeated hitting
- Restraining and hitting/punching
- Medical treatment necessary
- Lacerations that require stitches
- Throwing victim
- Broken bones/internal injuries
- Miscarriage/forced abortion
- Use of household objects as weapons

Lethality

Lethality is always possible from battering, as an unexpected "accident". In later phases, it is an almost predictable outcome. FBI statistics indicate that a family member commits 25% of all murders.

- Denial of medical treatment
- Use of conventional weapons (guns, knives, etc.)
- Disabling/disfiguring
- Murder

Financial/Economic Abuse

- Controls finances
- Refuses to share money
- Makes partner account for any money spent
- Doesn't want her to work outside the home
- Withholds money
- Hides bank books, check books, financial statements, birth certificates and passports
- Spends large sums of money and refuse to tell why or what the money was spent on

The abuser may also try to sabotage his partners work performance by forcing her to miss work, or by frequently making calls or repeated calls to her work place.

Rape and Sexual Abuse in Relationships

Sexual abuse in intimate relationships is such a common occurrence that most of us have a hard time recognizing these acts as abusive; as a result, the woman receives no validation of the pain and fear. Many of us have been told that there is no such thing as rape in marriage or intimate partnership; that our partner has the "right" to unlimited sexual use of our bodies even if we say or scream "no." This is a myth.

In Oregon, it is against the law for a man to rape his wife in spite of their legal union. Counselors who work with battered women often treat their clients not only as survivors of physical and emotional abuse, but also as survivors of rape and sexual abuse sustained from their partners.

Other Forms of Abuse

Often abuse can arise after a separation or divorce. Batterers may use custody and visitation in a way to re-establish control over their victims. For example, a batterer may fail to show up for scheduled visitation on time in order to harass the victim or create a reason for further contact.

Other methods of system abuse are:

- Threatens to report the victim to Child Protective Services
- Withholds child support and/or alimony payments
- Threatens to take the children away
- Threatens to take house/car/furniture away
- Withholds payments on car/house/etc.
- Uses the legal system in order to punish

Privilege could be an addition to the types of abuse. The "privilege" abuser feels his rank, title, gender, social position, and so forth, place him above social morals, values and often times, the law. Privilege abusers make all major decisions,

define the roles in a relationship, is in charge of the home and social life, and treats his partner like a servant or possession.

Barriers to Leaving

There are many misconceptions surrounding the domestic violence victims' decision to leave their abuser. Not understanding the dynamics of domestic violence, some people are so repulsed by this type of chronic abuse that they can't imagine why anyone would stay within a violent relationship. Others blame the woman for the repeated abuse because she won't leave her abuser. These fallacies are a far cry from the reality of the numerous obstacles that the victim faces when she attempts to leave her abuser.

The victim of abuse fears that when she tries to leave, she will not be able to survive on her own. There are many reasons for this fear, ranging from lack of finances, inability to care for her children without assistance, fear of what he will do when he finds her and her children, her desire to have a lasting relationship and father for her children, and her human desire to be with someone who loves her.

Most victims of domestic violence repeatedly attempt to leave the relationship, but return when they cannot overcome the obstacles of getting away from the abuser.

The question is not why does a victim stay, but rather, what are the obstacles that prevent a victim from leaving?

A victim may face any or all of these obstacles:

- Economic dependence on the abuser
- Fear for her safety and the safety of her children
- Lack of support of others
- Low self-esteem
- Beliefs about family and marriage
- Belief that she is the only person who can stop the abuser
- Belief that he will find her no matter what she does to try to leave
- Lack of options and resources
- Fear of being seriously hurt or killed if she attempts to leave
- Threats against others if the victim leaves
- Health concerns, especially those of the abuser

Safety Planning

If and when a victim is able to leave her battering environment, it is essential that she has a safety plan to increase her opportunity for a successful departure. Advance planning is critical. Start by assessing the batterer-generated and life-generated risks with her.

Based on this information, concerns and actions may need to include the following:

- Does she have family and friends with whom she can stay?
- Would she find a protective or restraining order helpful?
- Can a VSP safely contact her at home? What should the VSP do if the batterer answers the phone?

- Does she know how to contact emergency assistance?
- If she believes the violence might begin to escalate, can she leave for a few days?
- Does she know how to contact a shelter?
- Does she have a neighbor she can contact or with whom she can work out a signal for assistance when violence erupts or appears inevitable?
- If she has a car, can she hide a set of keys?
- Can she pack an extra set of clothes for herself and the children and store them along, with an extra set of house and car keys, with a neighbor or friend?
- Can she leave extra cash, checkbook or saving account book hidden or with a friend for emergency access?
- Can she collect and store originals or copies of important records such as birth certificates, social security cards, financial records and medical records for herself and her children?
- Does she have a concrete plan for where she should go and how she can get there, regardless of when she leaves?
- Does she have a disability that requires assistance or a specialized safety plan?
- Does she want access to counseling for her children or herself?
- Are there any other concerns that need to be addressed?

Protection Orders

Protection orders, also known as restraining orders, are issued by the courts and forbid the abuser from doing certain things to victims, having contact with victims and/or requires the abuser from complying with certain requirements.

While protection orders can be issued at any time, it is helpful for victims to seek restraining orders as soon as possible after a domestic violence crime has occurred.

Each jurisdiction has different policies and procedures for issuing and monitoring orders of protection. To best assist victims, VSP should be aware of the local policies and procedures involved with protection orders.

The types of relief available through the issuance of a protection order include:

- Prohibits and forbids respondent from abusing, threatening to abuse, or molesting, or engaging in any other conduct that would place petitioner in reasonable fear of bodily injury
- Restrains and prohibits respondent from using, attempting to use, or threatening to use physical force against petitioner that would reasonably be expected to cause bodily injury
- Restrains, prohibits, and forbids respondent from communicating or attempting to communicate with petitioner in any way and from entering or attempting to enter the home of the victim, place of employment, education, or other location as the Court may order

- Grant temporary custody of minor children
- Grant reasonable visitation or deny visitation
- Grant temporary child support
- Grant petitioner temporary financial support
- Grant petitioner temporary exclusive use and possession of the home and furnishings
- Forbids respondent from transferring, selling, destroying, encumbering, or otherwise disposing of real or personal property belonging to petitioner or jointly owned
- Gives petitioner assistance from law enforcement in the petitioner will be accompanied in removing personal property from the residences or in placing petitioner in possession of the residence and furnishings
- Reimburse petitioner for costs of attorney's fees
- Hold a hearing within 15 days of the filing of these papers
- Hold an emergency hearing within 24 hours
- Grant petitioner additional requests such as temporary financial support for payment of mortgage and/or rental payments plus any taxes and/or insurance on the property
- Federal Firearms Prohibition

Domestic Violence and its Effects on Children

It is significant that seven out of ten persons who enter domestic violence shelters are children. In 1998, the Centers for Disease Control published a study that indicated violence against mothers by their intimate partners may also pose a concurrent risk of abuse to the victim's children. Conversely, mothers of abused children are at a higher risk of being abused than mothers of non-abused children.

Children are often incorporated into patterns of abuse. Batterers may also physically or sexually abuse their children. It is not uncommon for the abuser to manipulate the children and use them as pawns in episodes involving partner abuse or attempt to get the children to take sides in partner disputes.

The effects on children who witness family violence (or who, in some cases, are themselves victims) greatly vary. The ramifications of family violence have almost no boundaries. In addition to the obvious physical injuries and deaths that result, family violence is often cited in research and clinical case studies as contributing to numerous other individual, family and societal problems.

One of the most damaging aspects of domestic violence that is witnessed by children is that they learn that violence toward a loved one is acceptable. This is compounded by the fact that the person who is behaving in this manner is supposed to be one of their role models. Children tend to exhibit fear, emotional symptoms, school phobias and insomnia. Young children may attempt to intervene, putting themselves at risk for unintended harm. After age five or six, children show strong indicators of identifying with the aggressor and losing respect for the victim. Many children suffer low self-esteem, sadness, depression, stress disorders, poor impulse control and feelings of powerlessness. Often, they are at

high risk for alcohol and drug use, sexual acting out, running away, isolation and suicide.

Girls and boys have different reactions. Sons usually become aggressive, acting out and behaving defiantly and destructively, whereas daughters become withdrawn, clingy and dependent. Some adolescent boys assault their mothers and siblings. Older children, especially girls, take on the burden of protecting their younger siblings during father's beatings. They feel constrained from leaving home.

Advocacy and Collaboration

Advocacy for Victims of Domestic Violence

As staff members and volunteers in communities throughout Oregon who assist, support and serve victims of domestic violence, it is imperative that we understand the dynamics of victimization.

Often VSP provide a lifeline to women and children who desperately need assistance and direction. It is important to identify the goals of the VSP who serve domestic violence victims. Empowerment, providing referrals and support, and working to protect victims' safety, are cornerstones of victim advocacy.

One of the most crucial skills a VSP must possess is the ability to validate the victim's feelings, fears and experiences. Many domestic violence victims do not view themselves as victims and fail to realize that domestic violence is a crime perpetrated against many other women. Effective communication skills, empathy and the development of a plan for follow-up contact, support or assistance from you or other community agencies is essential.

Victim-centered advocacy involves engaging in risk analysis with the client based on her perceptions. A VSP needs to find out what a client perceives as risks and how the advocate can most effectively use this information to advance the woman's plans and priorities. This involves a three-step process, which begins with helping the client identify what she perceives as batter-generated risks and what effects of staying or leaving may be on those risks. Secondly, the VSP helps the client identify life-generated risks and identify how the abuser may manipulate these risks to further his control. Lastly, the VSP assesses the client's past and current safety plans.

Gathering this information involves approaching each woman as a unique individual whose concerns may vary from those of other victims, listening effectively, and understanding that a woman's perspective will change as the process unfolds. Creating a safe place in which the woman can speak openly is key to making an accurate assessment of the risk factors involved. It is important that the VSP establish trust by listening to the victim's story and hearing her concerns and questions. Without a relationship of trust, the client is less likely to contact the VSP again.

Battered women analyze the risks to themselves and their children on an ongoing basis. What she fears as the biggest risk will likely change as his tactics change and as she receives information that allows her to reassess her previous concerns. Unfortunately, advocacy often stops at assessment of the physical risks, which is only one of her fears.

The first step of risk assessment involves the identification of batterer-generated risks. These include risk of physical injury, risk of psychological harm, child-related risks, financial risks, risks to family and friends, including the possible loss of relationships with them and risks involving arrest and legal status.

Next, the VSP assists the victim in identifying life-generated risks. These include such issues as finances, home location, physical and mental health,

disability or other forms of bias and inadequate responses from major social institutions including the legal and/or health system and workplace.

Once the batterer-generated and life-generated risks are discovered, the VSP can begin the process of giving the client complete and accurate information to dispel any concerns or to explain options to address the concern. The VSP can also begin the process of allowing the woman to engage in decision-making and safety planning. As women weigh the risks and their options, the decision they face is more complex than simply whether to stay or leave.

Some who work with victims of domestic violence put their emphasis on urging the victim to leave the relationship. This approach, may, in fact, put her at higher risk of danger. An appropriate response is to help her determine what her risks are and help her problem-solve how to minimize those risks. In some cases, staying within the relationship may be the safest response. Even if the woman does stay in the relationship, it does not mean that she accepts the violence. It cannot be overemphasized that leaving the relationship provides neither a guarantee of her safety nor a guarantee that other risks will be reduced, despite social beliefs to that effect.

Studies show that woman typically try many strategies to deal with the abuse. Researchers find the process of change is slow for most battered women, with an average of leaving five times before leaving permanently, and an average length of eight years to leave permanently.

Collaboration

For VSP who represent prosecutor-based victim assistance programs, it is imperative to take an active role in advocating for the domestic violence victim. As a VSP, you may provide assistance in securing protective measures, help prepare the victim for court appearances by explaining the criminal justice process to them, accompanying the victim to court, providing information about civil and criminal remedies and making appropriate referrals for counseling and support groups.

The safety of the victim and any children must be paramount in any decision made. VSP should provide the prosecutor with information regarding the desires of the victim, whether the victim is reluctant to testify and the need for the abuser to know the decision to prosecute rests with the State, not with the victim. This can reduce the likelihood that the abuser will pressure the victim throughout the trial.

Victims of domestic violence have specific rights relevant to the disposition of her case which, among others, includes notification of the disposition, opportunity to provide a victim impact statement to the court, input regarding specific probation conditions and notification of a convicted offender's release from incarceration or violation of any terms of community supervision.

VSP, criminal justice professionals, social service providers and allied professionals must effectively collaborate in order to provide quality services to victims of domestic violence. It is imperative that these community agencies develop and implement a coordinated response, by communicating regularly,

sharing information, promoting community awareness and conducting relevant trainings.

Resources

The following resources were used and/or adapted to compile the information in this section:

Straus and Gelles. (1990). Straus, Gelles and Steinmetz. 1980.

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